

**Darkness to Light, an Eastertide Service
(for Bridge Court MHA 18th April, 2025)**

Call to Worship: Matthew chapter 27 verses 45 and 46

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This cry from the cross contrasts with cries of ‘Hosanna!’ from the crowd who had greeted Jesus five days earlier as he entered Jerusalem on a young donkey. The week had been tumultuous, with the clearing of the traders in the temple, the Last Supper, when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet and his betrayal by Judas Iscariot in the Garden of Gethsemane. Our first two hymns retell the story so far.

The first hymn records Jesus riding into Jerusalem in triumph. Hymn number 265, ‘Ride on! Ride on in majesty’

1. Ride On! ride on in majesty!

**Hark! all the tribes ‘Hosanna!’ cry;
Thy humble beast pursues his road
With palms and scattered garments strowed.**

2. Ride on! ride on in majesty!

**In lowly pomp ride on to die:
O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin
O’er captive death and conquered sin.**

3. Ride on! ride on in majesty!

**The winged squadrons of the sky
Look down with sad and wondering eyes
To see the approaching sacrifice.**

4. Ride on! ride on in majesty!

**Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh;
The Father on his sapphire throne
Expects his own anointed Son.**

5. Ride on! ride on in majesty!

**In lowly pomp ride on to die;
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, Thy power, and reign. © Henry Hart Milman (1791 –1868)**

At the Last Supper, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet and predicted that one of them would betray him and everyone would desert him. Peter declared that he would remain faithful, but Jesus said that he would deny knowing him three times before the cock crowed twice.

Matthew chapter 26 verses 14 to 16

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. Amen.

Mark chapter 14 verses 43 to 50

Just as Jesus was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard."

Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

"Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Then everyone deserted him and fled. Amen.

The second hymn takes us beyond the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane. Hymn number 267, 'Jesus in the olive grove'.

1. Jesus in the olive grove

**Waiting for a traitor's kiss,
Rises free from bitterness.**

**2. As he wakes his comrades up,
Torches flicker in the glen;
Shadows turn to marching men.**

**3. In that dawn of blows and lies
Church and State conspire to kill,
Hang three rebels on a hill.**

**4. Innocent and guilty drown
In a flood of blood and sweat.
How much darker can it get?**

**5. How much darker must it be
For a God to see and care
That we perish in despair?**

**6. It is God himself who dies!
God in man shall set us free:
God as Man – and only he.**

**7. Let him claim us as his own;
We will serve as best we can
Such a God and such a Man!**

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Jesus faced a kangaroo court that was determined to have him crucified. During the proceedings, Peter was challenged about being a disciple on three occasions. Each time he denied it and as he denied Christ the third time, he heard a cock crow. Despite the efforts of the Sanhedrin, the Governor, Pontius Pilate, realized Jesus was innocent, but was afraid of the crowd.

Mark chapter 15 verses 6 to 15

Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

"Crucify him!" they shouted. "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder,

"Crucify him!" Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Amen.

Hymn number 284, 'There is a green hill far away,'

- 1. There is a green hill far away,
Outside a city wall,
Where our dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all.**
- 2. We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.**
- 3. He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by his precious blood.**
- 4. There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in.**
- 5. O dearly, dearly has he loved!
And we must love him too,
And trust in his redeeming blood,
And try his works to do.**

John chapter 19 verses 25 to 30

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said,

"I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said,

"It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Amen.

Hymn number 287, 'When I survey the wondrous cross'

- 1. When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.**
- 2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.**
- 3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;**

Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4. His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er his body on the tree;
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.

5. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

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John chapter 19 verses 38 to 42

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.

Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no-one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. Amen.

Address:

God's love for us is astounding, for throughout history he has tried to draw us close as his earthly children but our sinfulness, unwillingness to live as he calls us to, separated us from him. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments and sent prophets to guide us along the paths of righteousness, but all failed. Still he persisted, coming as Jesus to live among us.

Today's service tells us of how much God was prepared to sacrifice to destroy the power of sin and death: Jesus' death at Calvary. Had the story ended on the cross, the plan to redeem us would have failed, but on Sunday we shall recall and celebrate the resurrection and the empty tomb. Some people doubt the resurrection, but without it Jesus would have simply disappeared into the fog of history and there would be no Church. Here are some words from Paul that explain why the resurrection is essential and why we ought to believe it.

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 (ANIV)

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Amen.

Hymn number 292, 'After darkness, light'.

1. After darkness, light;

After winter, spring;

After dying, life:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

2. Take his body down;

Lay it in the tomb;

Love has overcome:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

3. Turn away in grief;

Turn away in faith;

Celebrate his death:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Come whatever may,

God will have his way;

Welcome, Easter Day!

Alleluia! Alleluia!

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John chapter 20 verses 1 to 9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Amen.

Hymn number 297, 'Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;'

1. Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;

His cross stands empty to the sky:

Let streets and homes with praises ring;

Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

2. Christ is alive! No longer bound

To distant years in Palestine,

But saving, healing, here and now,

And touching every place and time.

3. In every insult, rift and war,

Where colour, scorn or wealth divide,

He suffers still, yet loves the more,

And lives, where even hope has died.

4. Women and men, in age and youth,

Can feel the Spirit, hear the call,

And find the way, the life, the truth,

Revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

**5. Christ is alive and comes to bring
Good news to this and every age,
Till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.**

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John chapter 20 verses 10 to 18

Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her,

"Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said,

"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her,

"Mary." She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said,

"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. Amen.

Hymn number 316, 'When Easter to the dark world came'.

**1. When Easter to the dark world came,
Fair flowers glowed like scarlet flame: *Chorus***

***At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O glad was the world at Eastertide.***

**2. When Mary in the garden walked,
And with her risen Master talked: *Chorus***

**3. When John and Peter in their gloom
Met angels at the empty tomb: *Chorus***

**4. When Thomas' heart with grief was black,
Then Jesus like a king came back: *Chorus***

**5. And friend to friend in wonder said;
'The Lord is risen from the dead!' *Chorus***

**6. This Eastertide with joyful voice
We'll sing, 'The Lord is King! Rejoice!' *Chorus***

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John chapter 20 verses 24 to 31

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them,

"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

"Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him,

"My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him,

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. Amen.

Hymn number 305, 'Low in the grave he lay'

1. Low in the grave he lay,

Jesus, my Saviour,

Waiting the coming day,

Jesus, my Lord: *Chorus:*

Up from the grave he arose,

With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;

He arose a victor from the dark domain,

And he lives for ever with his saints to reign;

He arose! He arose!

Alleluia! Christ arose!

2. Vainly they watch his bed,

Jesus, my Saviour;

Vainly they seal the dead,

Jesus, my Lord: *Chorus:*

3. Death cannot keep his prey,

Jesus, my Saviour;

He tore the bars away,

Jesus, my Lord: *Chorus:*

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Let us pray.

Lord of all, on this most solemn of days in the Christian year, we have heard the story of Jesus' death at Calvary and his resurrection on Easter Day. It is not only an account of betrayal, cowardice, injustice and cruelty, but records your boundless grace, for Jesus suffered and died for all humankind, so the power of Satan could be broken and we are no longer slaves to sin.

It is also, of course, the mystery of Christ's resurrection which opened the gates of heaven for us, meaning that no longer has the final word. All honour, glory, power and praise are yours, our Lord and Redeemer.

Hear our prayer for peace, justice and mercy to prevail in this beautiful, broken world, so the darkness of wars, persecution and injustice are driven away by the light of your love and truth. Help us respond to your grace by loving you and our neighbours with patient, warm hearts, so we may be seen as your followers, in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Let us say the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn number 319, 'Thine be the glory'

1. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hath won;
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave-clothes where Thy body lay: *Chorus:*

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hath won.*

2. Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom,
Let His church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting: *Chorus:*

3. No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life!
Life is naught without Thee: aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conquerors, through Thy deathless love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above: *Chorus:*

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Benediction

May the gloom and sadness of Good Friday be driven away by the light of the news of the resurrection and the hope it offers freely to everybody. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us evermore. Amen.